

September 12, 2012

Dear Senate Appropriations Members:

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. My name is Laura Hall, and I am a resident of Lansing. I have followed this amendment and supported it since we began working on it seven years ago. I had the opportunity to come to a hearing back in February and share my story with some of you. I have returned to talk with you today because I feel so passionately about this issue and seeing this amendment passed into law. I can't articulate it any more simply than to say that, if passed, this legislation would change my life. I hope you will indulge me as I share with you a little about me, again.

I have always been a hard worker. I put everything I had into my education. I attended MSU, and upon receiving a Bachelor's degree continued on to receive my Master's of Social Work in 2006, receiving near perfect GPA's with both degrees. I have volunteered, worked for minimum wage, worked nights, and a host of other things just to gain experience and do the disability advocacy work I love. Personally, I don't feel as though my disability poses that much of a barrier to my success, but our current Medicaid system does.

I rely on a personal attendant to help me get out of bed, to shower, and dressed for work each day. I access these services through the Home Help Program, and Medicaid is the ONLY insurance that will cover this. Without this support, I would not be able to work at all, so really I only have one choice: to keep my income below the limits for Medicaid. When I have attempted to work more...to achieve more...I have been informed that I can only receive Medicaid through a deductible. I am more than happy to pay a deductible to receive the vital services, equipment, and medical care that are paid for by Medicaid. However, because of the way Medicaid deductibles are calculated in Michigan, I would have to pay over a \$1000 a month. Given my income, this would literally mean that I would have to choose between buying food or, say, repairing my wheelchair. I am not the only one in this situation, there are many faced with similar dilemmas.

The Freedom to Work Act is wonderful legislation that, to date has allowed over 7,300 people to work to their potential and pay taxes. These are people who otherwise, might be at home, possibly with their health deteriorating, relying on Social Security income. People with disabilities are talented, and among the most willing and eager to work, yet the unemployment rate among people with disabilities is well over 70%. If the Michigan Legislature is as committed to employment and the economy as it says it is, why would you not pass this legislation, when the only intention behind it is to help people work, pay taxes, and live independent lives?

To close, I'd just like to say that my dream was to help people in poverty, not live in poverty myself. It is hard to see my Social Work classmates out in the field, making two and three times what I make, living out *their* dreams – only because I need help getting out of bed in the morning. Myself, and others like me have been waiting a long time for this opportunity. Please move this legislation forward into the full Senate so that we may have the chance to reach our full potentials.

Thank You,
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